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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006839

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: CHP LEADERSHIP WAITING FOR FAILURE

REF: A. ANKARA 02153

[1](#)B. ANKARA 01358

[1](#)C. ISTANBUL 01729

Classified By: POLCOUNS John Kunstadter; reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) does not have a constructive political or electoral strategy for confronting the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP). CHP leadership is content to maintain its grip over the party, maintain the party's (eroding) representation in parliament, and wait for AKP to fail. This approach, however, has contributed to the party's intellectual stagnation and exacerbated internal tensions. CHP leadership must change or alter its approach if the party is to mount a serious challenge to AKP. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) CHP leader Deniz Baykal does not have a constructive political or electoral strategy for taking votes from governing AKP. According to CHP MP Abdulkadir Ates, the CHP leadership is content merely to maintain its grip over the party, maintain the party's representation in parliament, and wait for AKP to fail. Baykal and his inner circle, according to Ates, are waiting for an economic or foreign policy crisis to sap AKP's popularity and cause the party to divide into two or more groups. In this regard, Baykal and his loyalists spare no opportunity to criticize AKP for allegedly betraying the Turkish Cypriots and selling out Turkey's interests to the EU. They also use every opportunity to blacken U.S. policy, especially on Iraq, Kurds in northern Iraq, and the PKK and to accuse AKP of being a U.S. pawn. In the aftermath of AKP's fall, CHP, according to this scenario, would come to power at the head of a coalition government.

[1](#)3. (C) The problem with Baykal's approach is that CHP may fall apart before AKP. Since the 1990s, Baykal and his inner circle have manipulated the party by-laws to centralize the party machinery and tighten their grip over the party's central apparatus. They have also moved ruthlessly to silence critical voices. Baykal's authoritarian style has, according to several CHP contacts, led to the intellectual stagnation of the party and alienated many CHP reformists.

[1](#)4. (C) As a result, CHP's leadership has also been unable to address the ideological and electoral crisis facing the party. CHP faces a difficult electoral environment. Calling itself social democratic, CHP is a pro-establishment, status-quo, "secular party", but the majority of Turks are angry with the establishment, unhappy with the status-quo, socially conservative, and to a lesser or greater degree religious. Since 1983 the left-of-center parties have seen their combined vote generally hover between 25 and 35 percent.

Some CHP deputies believe that their party needs to adapt its ideology to new economic, religious, and social realities. The

most notable advocate of ideological reform within CHP is former

economic minister Kemal Dervis, but he has resigned from the party leadership (REF A). Contacts across the board

disparage his lack of will to fight for control of the party and note that he remains an advocate of top-down guidance (including an important role for the military) of a populace he has limited contact with.

[1](#)5. (C) Many CHP contacts are frustrated with the party leadership's inability or unwillingness to formulate a political, electoral, or public policy strategy to counter the rise of AKP. According to CHP MP Hasan Aydin, only 60 of CHP's 170-odd deputies support Baykal and the central party leadership. Only a small number of CHP deputies -- currently less than 30 -- are in open rebellion against Baykal. The majority of deputies, however, are hoping for new leadership, but afraid to publicly challenge Baykal and his inner circle. This past summer a number of CHP deputies tried to organize a party convention to oust Baykal from the party leadership, but they failed (REF B). This fall, CHP Istanbul Sisli Mayor Mustafa Sarigul has been sparring with Baykal, but most observers believe that corruption allegations against Sarigul, his arrogance, and

divisions within the opposition will limit Sarigul's ability to mount a successful challenge (REF C).

16. (C) Several Embassy contacts assert that Baykal and his inner circle will face their most serious leadership challenges in 2005 as the party elects new leaders at the grassroots level. In the past, Baykal and his crowd have successfully manipulated these elections to keep their supporters in power, but given the increased dissatisfaction with their leadership, the outcome of the 2005 party elections is less certain. It is clear, however, that the CHP leadership must change or alter its approach if the party is to mount a serious challenge to AKP.

EDELMAN